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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

FEBRUARY 1st, 1865.

TWO MUSICAL BIOGRAPHIES.

Louis Spohr's Autobiography, Translated from the German. London: Longman & Co.

Furioso; or Passages from the Life of Ludwig van Beethoven. From the German. Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co. London: Bell and Daldy.

THE life of a creative artist is always a matter of the deepest interest to his admirers. Their works, showing the various phases of their powers, speak only to the world, as an orator addresses a multitude, in that studied and dignified tone which should command attention and sympathy. But it is when they mix with their fellow men in the common affairs of every-day life, that we long to know those inner thoughts and feelings, the result of which—unconsciously perhaps even to themselves—colour their smallest artistic productions. The life of a musical composer has a peculiar charm, from the fact of his art being essentially abstract. The painter, seeing beauty of form and colour in every object, reproduces that beauty in a tangible shape upon canvass; but, glorify it as he may, he can do no more than represent what lies around us all. The sculptor can but carve his genius upon a monument which is a reproduction of the noblest works of his Creator. Even the architect bases his designs upon those natural objects which have first attracted the eye by their simple grandeur, and afterwards been moulded to the requirements of art. But the composer speaks in a language solely his own. As Göthe truly says, "it requires no subject-matter whose effect must be deducted; it is wholly form and power; and it raises and ennobles whatever it expresses." Indefinite therefore as music may be, it is the medium of communication between the composer and his audience; and through this medium only can his genius speak to the world. It is from this fact that the biography of a musician becomes doubly valuable; for it is here that we become acquainted with him as with a personal friend; and in his daily life we may often see the germ of many of those feelings which afterwards find utterance in the language of his art. Of the two works lying before us, the life of Spohr undoubtedly claims our principal attention. Not only because, unlike the second on our list, it traces the life of a great artist from birth to death, but because it is an autobiography, and consequently liable to no shadow of doubt as to its authenticity. Spohr's own hand traces his career from his childhood to the year 1838; and from this date to the time of his death the events are narrated from diaries kept by his wife, and reliable

materials furnished by other members of his family.

The early life of Spohr shows that genius such as he possessed must break through all the barriers opposed to his progress. His father had originally intended him for the medical profession; but having purchased a violin at the yearly fair, his enthusiastic little son practised upon it so vigorously that he soon learned to play the melodies he had been accustomed to sing; and after receiving a few lessons from Herr Riemenschneider, he relates that he was so elated at the sound he could produce simultaneously on all four strings that he hastened into the kitchen to his mother, and arpeggiated the chord to her so incessantly that she drove him out of the room. After various hard battles with his grandfather, "whose idea of a musician," he says, "was limited to that of a tavern fiddler who played to dancers," he was allowed to take lessons in composition; and produced, at a very early age, duets for two violins, which he played with his master at his father's musical soirées. "To this day," he writes, "I recollect the proud feeling of being already able to appear before the friends of the house as a composer. As a reward, I received from my parents a gala dress, consisting of a red jacket, with steel buttons, yellow breeches, and laced boots with tassels, a dress for which I had long prayed in vain." It was whilst at school, too, that he made the first attempt at the composition of a little opera, the text of which he took from Weisse's *Kinderfreund*. "It may be mentioned," he says, "as characteristic, that I began with the title-page; and first of all painted it very finely with Indian ink; then followed the overture, then a chorus, then an air, and then the work came to a stand-still."

We dwell upon these trifles in the youthful days of our artist because we here see so much of that peculiar character in the child, which afterwards strengthened and developed in the man. The minuteness of attention which he bestowed upon the title-page of his juvenile opera is to be traced in the composition of his ripest works; the violin bought at the "yearly fair," laid the foundation of one of the soundest schools of violin playing the world has yet seen; and we are inclined to think that much of that inward pride in his own achievements—which too often shut out the power of duly appreciating the efforts of others—is to be seen when he strutted about in his "gala dress," given him as a reward for his performance of his own compositions, which, even at a much later period of his life, he describes as "incorrect and childish," but possessing "a certain form and a flowing melody."

His patron, the Duke of Brunswick, deserves every credit for so carefully fostering the talent which he foresaw must one day make itself known throughout the world. To the great

annoyance of the Duchess, who could not bear her game at Ombre to be disturbed, the young violinist continually played at the court concerts, which were given in the apartments of the Duchess; and as cards and music did not agree, a thick carpet was spread out under the orchestra to deaden the sound, the leader left out the trumpets and kettle-drums, and insisted that no *forte* should be played in its full strength. This expedient for enjoying the cards at the expense of the music seems to have been seldom resorted to when the Duke was present. "One day," however, Spohr writes, "when the Duke was not there, and for that reason nobody was listening to the music; the prohibition regarding the *forte* being renewed, and the dreadful carpet again spread, I tried a new *concerto* of my own. I can only call these performances rehearsals, because no preparation was ever made beforehand, excepting on the days upon which we knew that the Duke would be present. Engrossed with my work, which I heard for the first time with the orchestra, I quite forgot the prohibition, and played with all the vigour and fire of inspiration, so that I even carried away the orchestra with me. Suddenly in the middle of the solo, my arm was seized by a lacquey, who whispered to me, "Her Highness sends me to tell you that you are not to scrape away so furiously." Enraged at this interruption, I played, if possible, yet more loudly; but was afterwards obliged to put up with a rebuke from the Marshal of the Court."

Being asked by the Duke to choose a teacher from amongst the great violinists of the day, he at once named Viotti; but on being applied to in London, it appeared that he had set up as a wine-merchant; and it is related of him that on being asked by a nobleman why he had abandoned his art and become a dealer in wine, he replied, "My dear sir, I have done so simply because I find that the English like wine better than music." Ferdinand Eck, who was then in Paris, was next written to on the subject; but he declined to give lessons; and eventually the young Spohr became a pupil of Francis Eck, a brother of the great violinist, and immediately started with him on an artistic tour to St. Petersburg. The details of this journey are full of interest; and no doubt on his return to Brunswick his talents had so far ripened as to justify him at once in aiming at the highest position in his profession, both as a composer and an executant. During his next tour he was appointed concert-master at Gotha, where he was married to Dorette Scheidler, an eminent performer on the harp; and in his diary the account of his courtship and betrothal is placed before the reader with that child-like simplicity which formed an integral portion of his character to the day of his death.

Whilst in the zenith of his fame, he travelled through Switzerland and Italy, giving concerts

with his wife, and establishing his fame in all the principal cities. As a composer, too, he was most prolific, the journal recording the names of many works which were produced during his travels, some of which still live, but many of which have sunk into obscurity. Indeed, it is during these bright days of his early life that we cannot but see how much he had narrowed his ideas on art; and—unlike Mendelssohn, who thirsted for fresh inspiration wherever he could find it—how thoroughly he worked on the model formed at the outset of his career, and regarded all who departed from his standard as infidels in art. Impatient of advice, he worked in solitude; and though a giant in his strength, he was merely placidly indifferent to those who doubted it. No man perhaps ever held a higher opinion of his own powers; and even where a composition of his did not satisfy him, he could not endure that others should think the same. After playing one of his quartetts on one occasion, Romberg said to him, "your quartetts will not do yet; they are far behind your orchestral pieces. Much as I agreed with him," Spohr continues, "yet it wounded me to hear another express that opinion. When, therefore, a few years afterwards, I wrote some quartetts in Vienna, which seemed to me more worthy of my other compositions, I dedicated them to Romberg, in order to show him that I could now write quartetts 'which would do.'"

As a critic on the works of contemporary composers, Spohr, as we have before mentioned, was illiberal; and, as time has proved, utterly wrong. Formed on the model of Mozart, he at once rejected all whose compositions soared beyond his ideal of the dignity of art. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he was totally unable to comprehend the meaning of Beethoven's later works; and especially looked upon the ninth symphony as trivial and utterly unworthy of being wedded to the poetry of Schiller. It will scarcely be credited that he broadly asserts, after hearing this composition, that he is now firmly convinced of what he before remarked in Vienna, that Beethoven is "wanting in æsthetical feeling, and in a sense of the beautiful." Weber's operas he could not endure; and of Rossini he remarks, that "had he been scientifically educated, and led to the only right way by Mozart's classical master-pieces, he might readily become one of the most distinguished composers of vocal music of our day; but as he now writes, he will not raise Italian music, but much rather lower it." This strange desire to cut down genius of all kinds to one recognised pattern, would seem strange indeed, were it not upon record that much of this criticism upon his fellow artists arose, in reality, from the total want of interest he felt in the compositions of contemporary composers, a fault by no means limited to Spohr, since in his own account of a meeting with Beethoven, he remarks: "He spoke of

music but very seldom; when he did, his opinions were very sternly expressed; and so decided as to admit of no contradiction whatever. In the works of others, he took not the least interest; I therefore had not the courage to show him mine."

His first journey to London, his performance at the Philharmonic Society, and his concert at the New Argyll Rooms in June, 1820, will call up many reminiscences of the state of music in England at that time; and Sir George Smart, who conducted his first concert on this occasion, will read with interest his description of the excitement in London on that morning, on account of the entry of Queen Caroline into the metropolis, to make her defence before Parliament. That Spohr was warmly received by the artists of England is fully attested by his own journal; but his meeting with Rothschild is too good to be passed over, in proof of the British mercantile view of art. After glancing over the letter of recommendation which Spohr handed to him, "I have just read," he said (pointing to the *Times*), "that you managed your business very efficiently. But I understand nothing of music; this is my music (slapping his purse), they understand that on the exchange. Upon which, with a nod, he terminated the audience. But just as I had reached the door, he called after me: "you can come and dine with me, too, out at my country-house!"

No event in the artistic life of Spohr gave him more pleasure than his journey to Norwich to superintend the production of his Oratorio *The Last Judgment*. On this occasion he made the acquaintance of one who has really the credit of having introduced the works of Spohr into England—Professor Edward Taylor, a zealous and conscientious musician, who translated the words of the Oratorio from the original German; and materially aided its success by his indefatigable exertions at the Festival. In a copy of *The Last Judgment*, published at that time by Novello (which, by the courtesy of Sir George Smart, we have been allowed to peruse), we perceive that it was produced at Norwich on Friday, September 24, 1830, the principal vocalists being Madame Stockhausen, Mrs. Wm. Knyvett, and Master Phillips, trebles; Mr. Terrail, counter-tenor; Mr. Braham and Mr. Vaughan, tenors; and Mr. Edward Taylor, bass. The conductor was Sir George Smart; and the band comprised the names of the best performers of the day. In the title-page of the copy from which we have extracted these particulars, Spohr has written, in German, "In remembrance of the friendly reception here again accorded to Louis Spohr and his wife." At the late sale of Professor Taylor's musical property, the whole of the copyrights of Spohr's Oratorios having been purchased by Messrs. Novello, we may reasonably hope that they will at once be placed within the reach of musical societies at a moderate expense.

Of the success of *The Last Judgment* at Norwich, it will now be unnecessary to speak. His next Oratorio, *The Fall of Babylon*, was composed to words supplied by Professor Taylor, and translated into German. This was performed at Norwich, under the direction of Professor Taylor, who conducted the Oratorio with much ability; but at a later period Spohr visited London once more; and after making a delightful tour through the most picturesque parts of England, with his friend Professor Taylor, directed a fine performance of his new work before a large audience; and was presented with a silver salver "with a beautifully engraved inscription; commemorative of the evening festival."

Our space will not allow us to dwell circumstantially upon the events which followed his return to his native land; although, intimately as his career was mixed up with the great continental artists, every entry in his journal is full of interest. On his last visit to London he was received with the utmost enthusiasm; and it is related that at a private soirée, he had the satisfaction of hearing his Oratorio *The Last Judgment* executed by eight-and-twenty amateurs with faultless precision; but unfortunately his opera of *Jessonda* (which he had especially come to London to direct) was delayed so long that he was obliged to return to Germany before its production. He still continued his artistic tours; and on the 12th April, 1859, conducted for the last time at a concert at Meningen, given in aid of the Widows' Relief Fund. His health now gradually failed him; but he still loved to hear music; and listened with attention, but in silence, to some four-handed arrangements of symphonies, performed by his wife and her sister. On Sunday, the 16th October, he retired calmly to bed, hoping that he should have "a good night's rest." He awoke refreshed, but with that absence of pain which spoke to the physician with a warning voice. With decreasing consciousness of existence, and with a serenity of countenance which seemed to link him with a higher world, surrounded by his family and friends, he passed away on the evening of the 22nd October, 1859, leaving behind him the memory of a good man and a conscientious artist.

This is not the place to discuss the merits of Spohr's works. The peculiar beauties of his style are not apparent to the multitude; but we hope and believe that, as a knowledge of art advances with the masses, his Oratorios will become as popular with the amateur as they are now with the musician. The recent fine performance of the first part of the *Fall of Babylon*, at the Hereford Festival, will sufficiently show that the difficulties of execution in this work are to be surmounted where real energy is brought to the task; and to the Sacred Harmonic Society we may reasonably look for an equal amount of

zeal in the presentation of the works of a composer who has been hitherto but too rarely heard in sacred music. Let us hope, also, that his operas, so teeming with beauty in melody, and so luscious in the richness of their harmony, may be more frequently given in our opera-houses. Violin players will take care of his concertos and chamber-music for their own sake; and his orchestral works will sufficiently plead their own cause; but where the caprices of vocalists have so large a share in ruling our lyrical establishments, it behoves all lovers of art to see that composers do not become their abject slaves.

We have spoken in the highest terms of the contents of this book; and we regret therefore to say, that the translation is in many places almost unintelligible. Added to this, many of the words are incorrectly spelt, and there is scarcely one musical example without a fault. It is evidently translated by a German; for we continually hear of a composition in H minor; and the key of C minor is usually called C flat. These errors should have been corrected before the name of so eminent a London publisher had been placed upon the title-page.

With every respect for the good faith of Professor Wegeler, on whose private diary the strange work called *Furioso* is based, we must confess to a feeling of disappointment when we find that, instead of detached passages in the life of Beethoven, the book is dressed up in the form of a narrative. It is difficult to conceive how Dr. Wolfgang Müller, to whom the diary was presented by Professor Wegeler in his last illness, could have gained the knowledge of Beethoven's thoughts, feelings and actions, day and night; and have the power of relating conversations with individuals at all times, when, according to Wegeler's own account, he was not himself present. The opening chapter of the book is conventional enough to usher in a common-place Romance. "One bright June morning," it commences, "in the year 1785, might have been seen among the low grounds at the foot of the Seven Mountains, lying between Königswinter and the Oelberg, a slight, well-grown youth, in the dress of a student of the period." The "slight, well-grown youth," is Professor Wegeler, who in his wanderings in search of plants and insects, is overtaken by a violent thunder-storm. "The rain poured down in great heavy drops," (we are told), "the lightning was incessant, whilst the convulsed atmosphere sought relief in continued discharges of thunder." In the midst of this deluge of rain, Wegeler beholds "a short muscular form, whose long black hair and garments were alike the sport of the tempest." The "singular individual," as he is called, unmindful of the drenching he was receiving, proceeded with a stick, which he held in his right hand, to conduct the thunder-storm: "Now an allegro!" he cried. "A flash of lightning

succeeded this command, terminating in a roll of continued thunder. "Adagio maestoso!" he then vociferated. And, apparently upon his bidding, followed an equally protracted growl of thunder. "Prestissimo furioso!" shouted the weather director; and exactly as if the heavens were really subservient to his commands, now resounded a tumultuous crash of elements, answering to a wild symphony, in which one strain or instrument strives to drown another." Students of Beethoven who would wish to trace, through the pages of Dr. Wolfgang Müller, how the "child" was "father of the man," may accept this as a fair specimen of the style of the book; and we can assure them that there is no little ingenuity displayed in forming a continuous story out of such materials as were furnished by the simple diary of Professor Wegeler. The introduction of the young Beethoven (or "Furioso," as he is nicknamed) to Count Waldstein, who becomes his firm friend; his intimacy with the Von Breuning and Von Honrath families, with all his love affairs, are told with surprising accuracy; as also his interview with the Emperor Joseph II., where he meets a "little man," with whom the Emperor is evidently on the most friendly terms.

"Have you already played Mozart's music?" demanded Joseph of Beethoven, winking at the little man.

"Certainly," answered the youth.

"And what is your opinion of him?"

"That he is the most melodious, graceful, and inexhaustible master that the world has ever known," said Beethoven. "Perhaps Sebastian Bach stands higher in church music, and Handel in Oratorios; but on the stage the Salsburg composer excels even Glück in finish; and in a characteristic representation of individuals and scenes."

After Beethoven had played an air of Mozart's, upon which he extemporised some variations, and a pianoforte composition of his own, which the "little gentleman" pronounced "not only of the highest order, but original throughout," the climax is brought about with a thorough knowledge of effect, thus:

"And your conclusive opinion of this young Bonn musician?" asked the Emperor of his companion.

"He will be among the first masters of the art," he said emphatically; and he reached Beethoven his hand.

"And do you know who delivers this judgment?" said the Emperor, turning to the youth.

Ludwig looked steadily at the little man.

"No," he answered.

"It is that of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart," said the Emperor, with emphasis.

Beethoven's heart bounded within him.

The career of "Furioso" is carried on until the year 1791, when he settles down at Vienna, as Ludwig van Beethoven, at the age of twenty-

one. It must not however be understood that upwards of two hundred pages can be filled with the bare facts to be found in Wegeler's diary; so that we have in addition to a record of Beethoven's early life, a long history of the Abbey of Heisterbach, a glance or two at the political aspect of the time, an account of the founding of Bonn University, and many other matters which keep our hero waiting, and somewhat mar the effect of a continuous narrative. At the gates of Vienna Beethoven is left for fifty-three years; and in the next chapter Bonn is celebrating a festival in which a statue of the great composer, who died in 1827, is to be unveiled to musical honours. Men who knew him intimately, now grown old, but fresh in their love for his genius, meet and talk openly of the great departed. Franz Liszt, the conductor, raises his staff, "and chorus and orchestra burst forth in a hymn composed in memory of Beethoven, and arranged to suitable music." The bronze figure, revealed in the full sunshine, becomes the centre of attraction to the vast multitude. "Then one long continued shout rose up to heaven." So ends the book; leaving the impatient worshipper of Beethoven in doubt as to his power of separating Wegeler from Müller, so as to be justified in remembering the one and forgetting the other. We have been candid in our opinions respecting this work, because we feel that the life of an artist is a matter of the utmost importance to art; and that no trifling with facts for the sake of book-making, should be permitted by those who have any power in guiding the public taste. That *Furioso* is of this class, we do not positively affirm; but we confess that the fine writing and melodramatic effects of Dr. Wolfgang Müller—even supposing that they were intended to ornament, and not to distort, the truth—do not prevent our regretting that the simple passages in the interesting diary of Professor Wegeler were not given to the world precisely as they were originally jotted down. We must add, in conclusion, that the work is exceedingly well translated; and that it is published in England with the full approval of Dr. Wolfgang Müller.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

ALTHOUGH Pantomime has been in the ascendant during the month, a one-act Operetta, called *Punchinello*, by Mr. Levy (already favourably known by his Operetta, *Fanchette*, produced during the Pyne and Harrison management at Covent Garden), has been brought out with decided success. The music is light, elegant, and full of vitality—occasionally perhaps betraying too close a reminiscence of the French composers upon whom Mr. Levy has founded his style—but good enough to show that we have a real writer amongst us, who may one day take rank as a composer of the school to which he very wisely devotes himself. As the work has already been withdrawn in favour of the ever-attractive *Faust*, it is unnecessary to do more than record its success, and to say that Miss Susan Galton has made a rapid stride in public estimation by her artistic singing in the principal part.

ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA.

WHATEVER may be the opinion of the operatic works hitherto produced at this establishment, it must at least be conceded that they were all from composers well known to the public; and it may reasonably be supposed, therefore, that a work from an untried hand would be accepted or rejected by the management solely on its own merits. For the sake of the critical judgment of the presiding powers, however, we trust that Mr. Clay's Operetta, *Constance*, produced on the 23rd ult., has not passed this ordeal; and we can only imagine that injudicious friends have, with a cruel kindness proverbial with the class, urged the young composer into premature notice, by persuading the management that an Operetta which is successful in a drawing-room, surrounded by friends, must be equally successful in an Opera-House, surrounded by the public. It will be unnecessary to do more than say that the scene is laid in Poland, at the time of its invasion by the Russians; and that the plot, which is taken by Mr. T. W. Robertson from a French melo-drama, turns upon the love of a young Polish soldier for a Countess, whose hand is also sought by the Russian Commandant of the city. Two spies, who are caught disguised as women, and condemned to be shot, effect their escape, and return in time to prevent the execution of the Countess's lover, who has also been made prisoner; and the story ends happily, with the capture of the Russians, and the usual florid *finale* for the heroine. The plotting of the Poles is materially aided by a *vivandière*, which character is archly played by Miss Thirlwall, but her music has so little vitality, even in the most animated scenes, that she could produce but small effect. The part of the Countess was sustained by Madlle. Martorelle, who gave the only melodious song in the Opera, "I have plighted my troth," with much expression and refined feeling, and received an unanimous encore. The want of any power in the composer to sustain dramatic interest was painfully felt where he was most ambitious to model his style upon the great operatic writers; and the acting concerted music therefore doomed the audience to perpetual disappointment, if we except the *stretto* of the duet between Mr. Haigh and Mr. Aynsley Cook, which, without any originality of subject, was marked and energetic enough to be encored. There is much musical feeling in the duet for soprano and tenor, "Mine in heaven, though not on earth;" but the want of genuine and spontaneous melody cannot be compensated for, even by a more artistic treatment of conventional materials than Mr. Clay has the power to bestow upon his work. With the audience, as usual, the Operetta was a success, and the composer was called before the curtain at the conclusion.

SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY.

THAT Spohr's sacred music has in it that enduring power which must ever make it welcome to the educated musician, is beyond a question; but any doubt as to its effect upon the general public must have been at once dispelled by the magnificent performance of his Oratorio, *The Last Judgment*, on Friday the 20th ult. Never do we recollect an audience more thoroughly impressed with the sublimity of a subject, or more carried away by its sympathetic treatment as a great musical picture. The choral singing was the finest we have yet heard in Exeter Hall; and remembering what the Sacred Harmonic Society was before the engagement of Mr. Costa as its conductor, we may reasonably hope that London may eventually possess as perfectly trained a body of choristers as can be found in any musical city of the world. The first chorus, "Praise his awful name," was especially remarkable for the precision with which all the points were attacked, particularly by the tenors and basses on the words "All glory and majesty;" and for delicacy of light and shade, the choral parts of the solo and chorus, "Blest are the departed" (which was enthusiastically encored), were irreproachable. Madame Lemmens-